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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the statement of the President of the Security Council dated 11 June 2015 (S/PRST/2015/12), in which the Council requested me to keep it informed about the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). It provides an assessment of the major political and security trends in the Central African subregion since my previous report, dated 30 November 2015 (S/2015/914), offers an update on progress in the implementation of the mandate of UNOCA, and reports on efforts to implement the United Nations regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (see S/2012/481).

II. Major developments in the Central Africa subregion

A. Political, peace and security developments and trends

2. The political environment in the subregion continued to be dominated by electoral processes that have often exhibited signs of tensions. Some of the countries in the region held elections during the period under review, while elsewhere preparations for elections are ongoing.

3. The persistent threat posed by Boko Haram and the successes realized by the regional Multinational Joint Task Force against it were highlights of the reporting period, as were the international, regional and national efforts to combat LRA.

4. The continued slump in oil prices and the ensuing economic difficulties in many countries of the subregion remained a factor behind political and social tensions.

Political developments and trends

5. On 11 March, during a meeting of the political bureau of the ruling party Movimento popular de libertação de Angola, the President of Angola, José Eduardo dos Santos, announced his retirement from political life in 2018, at the end of his current mandate in late 2017.

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6. In Cameroon, there have been calls to push forward the 2018 presidential elections, which would, however, require a change of the Constitution. On 29 March, during a press conference, four opposition political parties officially opposed a change of the Constitution, with some opposition leaders also opposing a further candidacy by President Paul Biya. After blocking access to the site of the press conference, the police detained several opposition leaders, their supporters and some journalists. They were all released the same day. On 7 April, in an open letter to the Minister for Territorial Administration, four opposition political parties criticized the Government for its stance on the freedom of assembly. On 8 April, around 20 supporters of two opposition parties, the Cameroon People's Party and the Mouvement pour la renaissance du Cameroun, were arrested in Yaoundé on charges of incitement to rebellion. The flyers they were distributing called upon the population to mobilize against the alleged limitation of political space by the Government and to protest against the lack of social services. They were subsequently released.

7. In Chad, on 13 February, the Government of Prime Minister Kalzeubet Pahimi Deubet was dissolved following his resignation. Albert Pahimi Padacké was appointed Prime Minister. Civil society, including youth organizations, launched frequent campaigns against poor governance, nepotism, impunity and inequality. In mid-February, students took to the streets over the rape of a 16-year-old girl, allegedly by the sons of senior military officials. The alleged perpetrators were arrested. Two students were killed by the police and army during the protests, and tens were injured or arrested. On 19 February, civil society organizations launched a campaign calling for the departure of President Idriss Déby Itno. This was followed by a day of countrywide general strike on 24 February, organized in protest of the President's bid for re-election, and a "ghost town" initiative on 26 February.

8. On 10 April, the presidential election took place in a peaceful, but tense, environment. Five civil society leaders were detained on charges of instigating an uprising, while at the same time local political dialogue mechanisms were absent. Although observers reported no major shortcomings in the organization of the election, some contentious electoral-related issues were rekindled ahead of the presidential vote, in particular regarding the reliability of the biometric census, with accusations by the opposition that the electoral commission had added minors and refugees to the voter registry. The debate on the biometric electoral cards did lead, however, to the postponement of the parliamentary elections, originally scheduled in June. On 21 April, the Independent National Electoral Commission announced that President Déby Itno had won the first round of the election, with 61.56 per cent of the votes.

9. In the Congo, anticipated presidential elections were held on 20 March without major incidents, but in a tense atmosphere. On 23 March, the electoral commission announced that President Denis Sassou Nguesso had been re-elected, with approximately 67 per cent of the votes, leading to a call from some presidential candidates to the Congolese population to rise up peacefully and reclaim their "stolen" vote.

10. On 4 April, the day the Constitutional Court confirmed President Sassou Nguesso's victory with 60.19 per cent of the vote, fighting between government forces and unidentified armed elements erupted in opposition strongholds in the southern part of Brazzaville. The armed elements set ablaze several police stations

and local government buildings, forcing thousands of local inhabitants to flee their homes. On the same day, the Constitutional Court rejected a request by the runner-up candidate, Guy-Brice Parfait Kolélas, for the annulment of the presidential election. During a press conference on 6 April, Mr. Kolélas questioned the decision by the Court to validate the results and dismiss his legal challenge, but called upon his supporters to accept that decision.

11. In a press statement issued on 4 April, the Government qualified the attacks as "terrorist action" and condemned the presidential candidates and their supporters, who had "consistently called for civil disobedience and armed insurrection". On 5 April, the Government confirmed that 17 people had lost their lives during the attack, affirming that authorities had been able to apprehend 50 members of the Ninjas Nsiloulou ex-militia, associated with former rebel leader Frédéric Bintsamou, alias Pastor Ntumi. On 6 April, Pastor Ntumi was removed by decree from his position as presidential adviser, a position he had occupied since 2007. Since then, an operation has been launched by the Government in the Pool region purportedly to arrest or destroy the pastor and his "Ninjas". The operation has largely been under way in a media blackout, with little information on its nature, extent or duration. The attacks have reportedly resulted in casualties and displacements to nearby forests and towns. Access to the United Nations and humanitarian actors has not yet been granted.

12. Prior to the elections, a revised electoral law, establishing a new electoral commission, the Commission nationale électorale indépendante, was adopted. The new commission is composed of representatives of the ruling majority, the opposition and civil society. On 19 February, the European Union announced that it would not deploy an electoral observation mission owing to insufficient electoral governance reforms, the reportedly unreliable nature of the voters' list and insufficient respect for the freedom of candidates and their supporters. On 10 March, five presidential candidates announced the establishment of a "technical electoral commission" to oversee the polls, including the processing and publication of voting results, owing to the lack of trust in the independence of the electoral commission. The Government considered this as "illegal", given that only the President of the Republic had the authority to appoint such a commission.

13. The Constitutional Court had announced on 24 February the approval of nine candidates for the presidential election, including President Sassou Nguesso. On multiple occasions in February and March, one of the opposition candidates, General Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko, was summoned and questioned by the authorities in relation to a video allegedly showing him plotting a coup some years ago. On 3 March, General Mokoko advocated for a deferment of the presidential election, criticizing the procedures in place, which he said would guarantee neither transparency nor credibility. He spoke out against a rushed process for voter registration and adoption of the electoral law, as well as an electoral commission that did not operate independently.

14. On 24 April, presidential elections, originally scheduled to take place in November, were held in Equatorial Guinea. According to provisional results announced by the National Electoral Commission on 28 April, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo won, with 93.7 per cent of the vote. In January, a voters' census was conducted and a committee, composed of representatives from the ruling and opposition parties, met in March to discuss the verification of the registration

results. On 8 March, the committee reported the outcome of the verification exercise to the President.

15. On 8 March, authorities suspended the campaign tour of key opposition figure Gabriel Nse Obiang Obono of the Ciudadanos por la innovación party until further notice, and arrested five of his supporters after they had been accused of assaulting a security officer at a public meeting two days earlier.

16. In Gabon, President Ali Bongo Ondimba declared on 29 February his intention to run for a second term in the presidential election scheduled for August. The ruling Parti démocratique gabonais validated his candidacy at a convention on 12 March. The former Chair of the African Union Commission, Jean Ping, was nominated on 15 January as the candidate of the opposition coalition Front de l'opposition pour l'alternance.

17. On 9 March, Alexandre Barro Chambrier, the leader of the Héritage et modernité dissenting wing within the Parti démocratique gabonais, announced his intention to organize a meeting to provide his views on recent political developments. Several hours later, he was expelled from the party along with two of his allies, all of whom were members of parliament. On 10 March, following a meeting during which President Bongo Ondimba's management style and policies were criticized, the Héritage et modernité movement announced that it would field its own candidate in the upcoming elections. On 31 March, the President of the National Assembly, Guy Nzouba Ndama, announced his resignation and on 5 April declared his candidacy for the presidential election.

18. In Rwanda, the National Electoral Commission announced, on 19 December 2015, that approximately 98 per cent of voters had voted in favour of a revised draft constitution that, among other things, changes previously set rules on presidential term limits. On 31 December, President Paul Kagame announced his intention to seek a third term in 2017.

Central African Republic

19. The political situation in the Central African Republic improved at the end of 2015, with a constitutional referendum held on 13 December and the first round of presidential and legislative elections on 30 December. None of the 30 presidential candidates obtained more than 50 per cent of the votes required to avoid a second round, which was held on 14 February. Meanwhile, the Constitutional Court annulled the first round of the legislative elections, citing gross irregularity in the electoral process. The rescheduled legislative elections took place on 14 February, with a second round held on 31 March. Central African refugees and members of the diaspora in some neighbouring States were able to participate in their country's elections.

20. The overall security situation throughout the electoral period remained calm. Faustin Archange Touadéra won the election, with 62 per cent of the votes cast in the second round. His run-off opponent, Anicet Georges Dologuélé, garnered approximately 37 per cent of the votes and did not challenge the results. Mr. Touadéra was officially sworn in on 30 March, thereby formally ending the country's transition within the time frame stipulated by the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) at its Extraordinary Summit on 25 November 2015.

Boko Haram

21. The Boko Haram terrorist group continued to carry out a number of deadly attacks against civilians in Cameroon and Chad, of which the following were the most significant. On 5 December, 3 female suicide bombers killed 27 civilians and injured 8 others in a market on Koulfoua Island on the Chadian side of Lake Chad. On 13 January, a suicide bomber killed 12 civilians at a mosque in the village of Kouyape in the Far North Region of Cameroon. On 25 January, 4 young female suicide bombers killed 29 civilians and injured nearly 100 others at the market of the village of Bodo in the same region of Cameroon. On 19 February, 2 young female suicide bombers killed 22 people and injured another 112 at the market of the village of Meme in the Far North Region of Cameroon. In addition, attacks against isolated villages occurred on an almost daily basis. According to official figures announced by the Government of Cameroon on 15 January, Boko Haram has killed nearly 1,200 people since 2013, including 1,098 civilians, 67 soldiers and 3 police officers, during 315 raids and 32 suicide attacks.

22. The frequency and effectiveness of Boko Haram attacks in Chad and Cameroon decreased during the second half of the reporting period owing to several factors, including new equipment reinforcements such as drones and armoured vehicles as well as improvements in intelligence-gathering. The Cameroonian and Chadian armed forces, operating either under their national command or under the Multinational Joint Task Force, frequently and pre-emptively engaged Boko Haram operatives, including during cross-border operations, further weakening the group. On 15 February, the Cameroonian armed forces announced that they had killed 162 Boko Haram fighters and freed more than 100 hostages during an operation several days earlier in Goshi, in the State of Borno, Nigeria. On 5 April, the Cameroonian and Nigerian troops operating under the Multinational Joint Task Force announced that around 300 Boko Haram fighters had been captured and more than 2,000 hostages liberated following a joint operation in the area of Walasa, State of Borno, Nigeria. Cameroonian and Chadian authorities have continued to strengthen security measures to prevent attacks or reduce the number of civilian targets, albeit at times at the cost of further disruption to livelihoods. In late January, the Cameroonian authorities closed a large number of schools and markets in eight districts of the Mayo Sava, Mayo Tsanaga and Logone-et-Chari departments in the Far North Region.

23. On 1 February, the African Union organized a donors' conference in Addis Ababa to mobilize additional resources for the Multinational Joint Task Force. The total contributions pledged to the support of the Task Force, since its inception, including for humanitarian assistance and development support, amounted to $250 million. The total annual budget for the Task Force is $723 million. On 14 May, the Second Regional Security Summit was held in Abuja.

Lord's Resistance Army

24. Since the beginning of 2016, LRA has significantly stepped up its activity in eastern Central African Republic, especially in the mining areas east of Bria in the Haute-Kotto prefecture and along the Mbomou River between the towns of Rafai and Obo. According to the LRA Crisis Tracker, LRA was responsible for 42 incidents, 6 civilian fatalities and 252 civilian abductions in the Central African Republic in the first quarter of 2016 — a marked increase compared with 52 incidents, 5 civilian fatalities and 113 civilian abductions in 2015. On 17 April, a

peacekeeper from the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) was killed when a patrol was dispatched to Rafai in response to an attack on the nearby village of Agoumar by alleged elements of LRA. The Lord's Resistance Army has demonstrated increased boldness, by attacking larger or less isolated population centres, deviating from its long-standing low-profile posture. An increased number of children have been kidnapped and kept. The surge could be attributed to the dry season, the alleged forced withdrawal of LRA groups from the Kafia Kingi enclave, and some LRA groups operating independently from Joseph Kony's command.

25. On 18 March, President Touadéra visited Obo to discuss counter-LRA efforts with relevant stakeholders, in particular the African Union Regional Task Force, the Special Forces of the United States of America and MINUSCA.

26. Suspected LRA groups continued to attack the civilian population in north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo — mainly short-term abductions — in isolated areas in the Haut-Uélé and Bas-Uélé provinces, in addition to poaching elephants in Garamba National Park.

27. From 21 to 27 January, the confirmation of charges hearing in the case of the former LRA Commander, Dominic Ongwen, took place before Pre-Trial Chamber II of the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Mr. Ongwen had been charged with 70 counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes. On 23 March, Pre-Trial Chamber II issued a decision confirming the 70 charges and committed Mr. Ongwen to a trial.

28. On 6 February, the senior LRA commander, Okot George Odek, surrendered to ex-Séléka in the town of Pambayamba in Haute-Kotto prefecture in the Central African Republic. He was subsequently handed over to the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) contingent of the African Union Regional Task Force based in Obo.

29. On 7 March, the Security Council Committee established, pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic designated LRA and its leader, Joseph Kony, as being subject to the measures imposed by paragraphs 5 and 8 of Security Council resolution 2262 (2016).

30. On 8 March, the United States Department of the Treasury designated LRA and Joseph Kony pursuant to Executive Order 13667 of 12 May 2014 for engaging in the targeting of civilians in the Central African Republic through the commission of acts of violence, abduction and forced displacement. This action complements the listing pursuant to Security Council resolution 2262 (2016), freezes any LRA assets within the jurisdiction of the United States and prohibits United States persons from engaging in transactions with the group.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

31. Since my last report, 19 incidents of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea were reported by the International Maritime Organization.

B. Humanitarian developments

32. The humanitarian situation in the subregion continues to be of concern and presents multifaceted challenges, including in the context of the situation in the Central African Republic and the Boko Haram-related crisis, which to date has resulted in 209,853 refugees and about 2.6 million internally displaced persons, including 1.5 million children, in the Lake Chad Basin region.

33. The Central African Republic remains one of the world's most serious protection crises. During the reporting period, over half of the country's population (approximately 2.3 million people) required humanitarian assistance, while one quarter of the population was displaced, with approximately 420,231 internally displaced and 467,000 people living as refugees in neighbouring countries. Refugees from the Central African Republic represent the largest caseload in Cameroon and constitute approximately 25 per cent of the people having sought refuge in Chad.

34. Three years of conflict and ongoing displacements in the Central African Republic continue to disrupt agriculture and severely constrain people's access to food, as they struggle with the effects of multiple poor harvests, disrupted markets and soaring prices for many staple foods. Approximately half of the population faces hunger. The country's overall crop production in 2015 remained 54 per cent below the pre-crisis average, despite a 10 per cent increase from 2014, attributed mostly to a rise in cassava production.

35. The humanitarian impact of Boko Haram-related violence in the Far North Region of Cameroon is grave. The number of internally displaced persons has increased to 169,970. Cameroon also hosted approximately 64,891 Nigerian refugees, and some 50,000 people who had fled violence were forcefully returned to Nigeria. The eastern part of the country continued to host more than 250,000 refugees from the Central African Republic.

36. In Chad, the humanitarian crisis continues to deepen, with over 1 million people expected to be severely food insecure in 2016, twice as many as in 2015, owing to Boko Haram-related violence around Lake Chad and poor rainfall in the 2015 season in the eastern and central regions. In this context, it is estimated that 365,000 children will suffer from malnutrition in 2016. Chad also hosts approximately 375,000 refugees from the Sudan, Nigeria and the Central African Republic. In the Lake Chad area, the number of people affected by Boko Haram-related violence increased in the fourth quarter of 2015. Approximately 56,000 people are internally displaced, with tens of thousands of displaced persons identified in January 2016 in localities previously inaccessible to humanitarian actors.

37. The humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region remains of concern, particularly owing to ongoing crises in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the latter, 7.5 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance, including more than 1.5 million internally displaced persons. The activity of armed groups, military operations and an increase in intercommunal tensions led to numerous new displacements throughout the east and constrained humanitarian access. The humanitarian situation is compounded by the continuous influx of refugees, including new arrivals from Burundi, the Central African Republic and South Sudan; a total of 173,000 people were registered as refugees. In Burundi,

growing political tensions and violence related to the presidential election in 2015 is increasingly disrupting livelihoods, particularly in Bujumbura. In this context, humanitarian needs are emerging, as 730,000 people are severely food insecure, 1.1 million people require protection and health services and 200,000 people require education assistance. At least 479 people have been killed since April 2015. More than 258,000 Burundians have fled to neighbouring countries, and some 85,000 are estimated to be internally displaced.

C. Human rights trends

38. The human rights situation in the subregion remains of grave concern, particularly as a result of continuing Boko Haram attacks in Cameroon and Chad, as well as abuses perpetrated by armed elements in the Central African Republic. Concerns were also raised regarding alleged human rights violations committed during military operations against Boko Haram, with reports that security forces of the affected countries had killed and arbitrarily arrested civilians suspected of links with the group. There were also serious allegations of torture, sexual violence, the destruction and appropriation of property and prolonged pretrial detention by security forces. According to the United Nations Children's Fund, nearly one out of every five Boko Haram suicide bombers is a child, almost three quarters of whom are girls. Security forces believe that Boko Haram operatives live among the local population. Anti-insurgent operations are therefore confined to villages, which in turn results in high civilian casualty rates. At times, this has compromised cooperation with the local population.

39. Actions taken in the context of several electoral processes across the subregion have been an issue of concern. In Cameroon, security forces suppressed demonstrations calling for President Biya to step down, while in the Congo and Chad, all telecommunications were cut for several days around the elections. Some candidates and their supporters stated that their freedoms of movement, expression, assembly, and association were undermined during the campaign and after the elections. Attacks against government buildings by militias in Brazzaville in the aftermath of the presidential election resulted in heavy clashes with security forces.

40. In the Central African Republic, MINUSCA documented 269 new verified incidents of violations or abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law committed against 915 victims, including 53 women, 48 boys and 30 girls. These violations included arbitrary killings, cases of cruel and inhuman treatment, conflict-related sexual violence and sexual and gender-based violence, as well as arbitrary arrest and detention. Eighteen incidents of human rights violations and abuse related to allegations of witchcraft affecting mainly women and children were documented. Those responsible for the violations were elements from the anti-Balaka, ex-Séléka, LRA and State authorities.

41. In the Congo, allegations of serious human rights violations were reported during the post-electoral period in April 2016 in the Pool region; however, access to the affected areas has been limited by the Government and humanitarian and human rights actors have been unable to assess the situation, provide assistance and monitor and report on the alleged violations.

42. States of the subregion continued their cooperation with the United Nations and other human rights treaty bodies. Chad deposited an instrument of ratification

of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. The Government also expressed the wish to host a country office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

D. Socioeconomic trends

43. Economic difficulties, leading, among other things, to retractions in business operations, subsidy reductions and salary payment difficulties, have continued to result in heightened social tensions in several Central African States. In Angola, growth in the industrial, construction and services sectors has decreased considerably owing to the decline in public investment and private consumption and difficulties in obtaining foreign currency. The financial crisis has forced budget reductions and unpopular measures, such as the reduction of oil subsidies, while trying to preserve the social sectors. In December, teachers in Gabon launched a one-month strike, demanding the payment of various bonuses and the unpaid balances of their salaries for 2014 and 2015. Young graduates demonstrated in Chad in February against the Government's decision to freeze recruitment into the public service for three years.

44. On 17 December, the Bank of Central African States lowered its expected growth rate forecast for 2015 for the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) area to 2.4 per cent, down from 4.3 per cent last March. The decline was attributed mostly to the sharp decrease in oil prices and the closure of borders as a result of Boko Haram violence, affecting trade and commerce. On 22 March, the Bank released figures noting a measured decrease in economic activity in 2015, down from 4.8 per cent in 2014 to 2.8 per cent in 2015.

III. Activities of the United Nations Office for Central Africa

A. Good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation

45. My Special Representative continued to be actively engaged in the subregion to promote regional peace and security and prevent conflict, including by undertaking a variety of country-specific visits.

Central African Republic

46. My Special Representative continued his role as the United Nations representative in the international mediation on the crisis in the Central African Republic, in close collaboration with my Special Representative for the Central African Republic and Head of MINUSCA.

47. My Special Representative was actively involved in efforts to organize the Extraordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government of ECCAS, held on 25 November, which provided an impetus for the political process in the Central African Republic, reinforced the commitment of subregional States and contributed to accelerating preparations for the elections, while also formally extending the transition until 31 March. In the same vein, he used the opportunity of the visit of Pope Francis to Bangui on 29 and 30 November to consult with stakeholders and

took part in the Pope's important visit to the Muslim enclave of PK5. These events were instrumental in shaping the next steps in the process and improving the political and security climate.

48. My Special Representative stepped up efforts to mobilize leaders in the subregion in support of the Central African Republic, including to ensure their full commitment to the elections. In particular, from 17 to 19 December, he travelled to Brazzaville to consult with President Sassou Nguesso, the International Mediator on the crisis in the Central African Republic. They agreed on the need for stronger political and military messaging to potential spoilers, on the basis of a request from Central African Transitional Authorities and all stakeholders. He also held regular consultations with the Governments of Cameroon, Chad, the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, including for resource mobilization.

49. From 5 to 8 February, my Special Representative travelled to Bangui to assess the situation and contribute to efforts to maintain a peaceful environment in the run-up to the second round of the presidential election and the legislative polls. He met with the presidential candidates and reminded them of their pledge to abide by democratic principles. He met the Head of State of the Transition and representatives from other institutions to encourage them to overcome the challenges that affected the organization of the first round. He also met with other political players, including unsuccessful candidates in the presidential election, to advocate for their continued engagement in the political process, including the legislative elections.

50. On 9 February in Brazzaville, my Special Representative exchanged views with the International Mediator and met with him again on 19 March to discuss the manner in which ECCAS and other countries in the region would continue supporting the Central African Republic. On 30 March in Bangui, my Special Representative attended the swearing-in ceremony of President Touadéra and met with him to discuss the way forward on a number of key issues for the country, offering assistance from UNOCA.

Chad

51. My Special Representative met with President Déby Itno in January on the margins of the African Union Summit, and once again in February, during a visit to Chad in the course of a diplomatic tour of Boko Haram-affected countries. He discussed the situation in Chad ahead of the presidential election and stressed the importance of a peaceful process and the need for consensus on all major issues of national importance. During the visit in February, he met with the opposition leader, Saleh Kebzabo, and reiterated the importance of a peaceful election.

52. From 1 to 11 April, my Special Representative visited N'Djaména to help to defuse tensions and prevent post-electoral violence. He engaged with stakeholders, including representatives of civil society, calling upon the authorities to practise restraint, in line with international human rights and law enforcement standards. He also called for respect for public liberties, as well as compliance with democratic and rule of law principles.

53. At the request of the Government, UNOCA deployed a senior consultant to Chad, with the support of the Resident Coordinator, to assess the state of political dialogue ahead of the elections and recommend possible United Nations action. The

consultant facilitated two political dialogue workshops in December: one with political stakeholders and the other with civil society organizations. The workshops, organized by the Cadre national de dialogue politique, enabled participants to openly discuss and develop solutions to issues of common interest.

Equatorial Guinea

54. My Special Representative travelled to Malabo from 23 to 26 April to assess the situation in-country and avail his good offices in the context of the electoral period, meeting with President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo and other senior government officials, opposition candidates and the head of the African Union observation mission.

55. From 29 March to 1 April, the Director of Political Affairs of UNOCA travelled to Malabo to meet with key stakeholders on issues related to the presidential elections and other political and security issues facing the country. During the mission, the Director held consultations with senior government officials responsible for election preparation and other issues; development partners; civil society representatives; and members of the diplomatic community.

Gabon

56. My Special Representative continued to encourage Gabonese political actors to engage in constructive processes of dialogue on matters of national interest, particularly regarding the upcoming elections. In carrying out his good offices, my Special Representative engaged in extensive consultations with Gabonese political stakeholders, including key government officials and opposition leaders, as well as with members of the diplomatic community.

The Congo

57. Ahead of the presidential elections and following the promulgation of the new Constitution, my Special Representative travelled to Brazzaville several times to assess political developments and encourage stakeholders to demonstrate a willingness to dialogue and ensure a peaceful electoral process. During these visits, he met with President Sassou Nguesso, senior government officials, opposition leaders and representatives of the diplomatic community. He also met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs on the margins of the African Union Summit held in January, during which he underlined that he would continue to engage Congolese political actors to ensure that the elections were peaceful.

58. With the support of the Government, my Special Representative deployed a support team to the Congo from 14 February to 30 March. Led by the Director of Political Affairs of UNOCA and comprising staff members from the Office, the Department of Political Affairs and OHCHR, the team assisted my Special Representative in his good offices role by maintaining contact with key stakeholders in the country, providing early warning of possible challenges and boosting the political and human rights capacity of the United Nations country team during the electoral phase. My Special Representative travelled to Brazzaville from 15 to 25 March to carry out his good offices during the electoral period. He met with relevant actors, including the presidential candidates, civil society organizations, the Commission nationale électorale indépendante, the media and international partners. On 18 March, he issued a communiqué, calling upon all political actors to maintain

a peaceful electoral process and resolve possible future disputes through dialogue and the established legal procedures. On the eve of election day, my Special Representative reiterated the call for restraint and stressed that any outage of communications could potentially be counterproductive.

59. On 16 April, my Special Representative travelled to Brazzaville to attend the swearing-in ceremony of President Sassou Nguesso, with whom he met on 19 April and raised concerns about the situation in the Pool region, underlining the readiness of the United Nations to support the country in areas such as dialogue, governance, decentralization and youth.

Sao Tome and Principe

60. From 18 to 22 March, UNOCA undertook an early warning assessment visit to Sao Tome and Principe. The mission consulted with national and international stakeholders on peace and security issues, including the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, as well as political risks related to the upcoming presidential elections.

Elections

61. UNOCA facilitated a capacity-building workshop in Brazzaville on 2 and 3 March for approximately 40 journalists, in which representatives from OHCHR, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Government of the Congo took part. The workshop focused on the process of media coverage of the presidential election in the country and on ensuring that it would take place in a peaceful environment. It resulted in the approval of a media code of conduct for the electoral period.

62. UNOCA facilitated, along with the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa and UNDP, a workshop in N'Djaména on 22 and 23 March for the benefit of local journalists, ahead of the presidential election. Participants endorsed a code of conduct for the media during elections.

B. Support to the United Nations, regional and subregional initiatives on peace and security

United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

63. In its capacity as the secretariat of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, UNOCA worked closely with the President of the Committee (the Government of Gabon) to implement the recommendations from the previous meeting, held in Libreville from 23 to 27 November. That meeting had resulted in declarations on: (a) the adoption of a regional strategy on counter-terrorism and the non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa; (b) the fight against poaching; and (c) the operationalization of the Interregional Coordination Centre for maritime security. Members of the Committee were urged to: fulfil their commitment to contribute to the voluntary Trust Fund of the Committee, in accordance with the Libreville Declaration of May 2009; ratify the Central African Convention for the Control of

Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components That Can Be Used For Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly (Kinshasa Convention); and sign and ratify the Arms Trade Treaty. The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for 6 to 10 June in Bangui.

Collaboration with regional, subregional and intergovernmental organizations

64. My Special Representative attended the twenty-sixth ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union on 30 and 31 January and took part in high-level meetings relevant to the mandate of UNOCA. On 11 March, he held discussions with the Secretary-General of the International Organization of La Francophonie, in the context of the latter's engagement in Gabon and the Congo.

Mediation

65. In follow-up to the recommendations of the United Nations senior consultant to help advance political dialogue efforts in Chad (see para. 53 above), two experts from the Mediation Support Unit of the Department of Political Affairs deployed to N'Djaména from 27 March to 3 April to support UNOCA and the United Nations country team's work in support of the Cadre national de dialogue politique. The suggestions by the experts will be followed up by all relevant United Nations entities during the post-election period, and in particular ahead of the legislative elections, which are scheduled to take place later in 2016 or in 2017 (the date remains to be confirmed).

Boko Haram

66. From 12 to 19 February, my Special Representatives for Central Africa and West Africa undertook their third joint tour of Boko Haram-affected countries, namely, Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria. The visits to the Niger and Benin were postponed owing to elections being held at the time. My Special Representatives met with senior officials in the three countries, as well as with the Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Force Commander of the Multinational Joint Task Force. They encouraged their interlocutors to address the Boko Haram issue in a holistic manner, with due respect for international humanitarian and human rights law, and stressed the need for all Boko Haram-affected countries to closely work together to address the regional threat. They also encouraged them to hold the long-planned joint summit of ECCAS and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on Boko Haram.

Regional integration

67. My Special Representative undertook discussions with the Secretary-General of ECCAS regarding the challenges facing the subregional organization. The Secretary-General of ECCAS requested support from UNOCA in the reform of the institutions of ECCAS. The two also discussed the possibility of organizing a joint regional conference on the benefits of integration in Central Africa.

68. From 25 to 26 April, UNOCA and ECCAS held a retreat, during which they discussed a new cooperation framework between the two organizations and the action plan for 2016. The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

(UNOWAS) was also invited to take part in the light of its experience in cooperating with ECOWAS.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

69. In an effort to make progress towards the operationalization of the Interregional Coordination Centre, an extraordinary session of the annual meeting of heads of ECCAS, ECOWAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission was held in Yaoundé on 12 February, in which my Special Representative participated. The meeting ended with the approval of a number of recommendations on the programme of activities, budget and administration of the Centre for 2016-2017. On 25 April, the Security Council welcomed the holding of the Extraordinary High-level Meeting on the Interregional Coordination Centre. The Council also welcomed the initiative to hold an African Union summit on maritime security and safety and development in Africa, in Lomé on 15 October (see S/PRST/2016/4).

70. During the reporting period, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime conducted capacity-building activities for the coast guard of Sao Tome and Principe and provided assistance to develop enhanced legal frameworks for the country in the area of maritime crime.

Regional strategy and plan of action on counter-terrorism and the non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa

71. The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) and the UNDP Regional Service Centre for Africa recently completed a small arms survey to collect and analyse comprehensive quantitative and qualitative information on small arms and light weapons in several countries, including Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Chad. This survey will contribute towards a three-year UNREC programme on physical security and stockpile management. Survey results will also inform a programme to strengthen the capacity of countries to implement Security Council resolution 2178 (2014) by preventing the acquisition of arms and ammunition by terrorist groups.

Coordination of the implementation of the United Nations regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the Lord's Resistance Army

72. UNOCA convened the biannual meeting of LRA focal points on 5 and 6 April in Entebbe, Uganda. Focal points from the African Union, United Nations entities, bilateral government partners, non-governmental organizations, and civil society from LRA-affected areas attended the meeting. Participants undertook an in-depth review of the United Nations regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the activities of LRA and its implementation plan. Participants noted that some progress had been made in certain areas, but little had been achieved outside northern Uganda on humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding, human rights, the rule of law and long-term development. Participants agreed that the strategy and its implementation plan remained largely valid, though several objectives were unlikely to be met soon. Participants stressed the imperative of holding the fifth meeting of the Joint Coordination Mechanism of the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of LRA without further delay.

(a) Operationalization of the African Union Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army

73. The African Union Commission remains committed to supporting the implementation of the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of LRA; however, its progress is being undermined by severe financial constraints. These have resulted in the non-implementation of the Action Plan of the African Union Special Envoy for LRA Issues, including a fact-finding mission to Kafia Kingi as a follow-up to his mission to Khartoum in September 2015 and the convening of a meeting of the Joint Coordination Mechanism and a meeting of national focal points to develop a plan of action for the stabilization, recovery and rehabilitation of LRA-affected areas. The lack of resources also resulted in the non-payment of the rent of the premises and other operational costs of the African Union Regional Task Force headquarters in Yambio, South Sudan, during most of the reporting period. This has caused serious complications in the ability of the Regional Task Force to support ongoing operations against LRA.

74. The Regional Task Force has an authorized strength of 5,000 troops. It is currently composed of 2,498 troops, including 1,437 from the UPDF, 487 from the Sudan's People Liberation Army, 499 from the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC), 62 from the Forces armées centrafricaines and 13 staff at headquarters.

75. On 14 January, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), in coordination with FARDC, including the latter's contingent of the Regional Task Force, launched Operation "RED KiTE". MONUSCO provided support to FARDC in the areas of intelligence-gathering and exerting military pressure on LRA concentration areas and routes. MONUSCO established three mobile operating bases in Badolo, Kpaika and Nagero, located 7 km west of Bangadi, 25 km south of Duru and 24 km north-west of Faradje, respectively.

76. In response to the recent surge in LRA attacks in the Central African Republic and in line with Security Council resolution 2217 (2015), MINUSCA intensified its cooperation and information-sharing with the Regional Task Force and United States Special Forces. The establishment of a joint tactical operations centre in Bria is being finalized.

77. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) continued to provide overall logistical support to staff of the headquarters of the Regional Task Force in Yambio.

(b) Protection of civilians and humanitarian assistance

78. MINUSCA took measures to enhance protection of civilians through ground patrols in LRA-affected areas such as Obo, Bangassou, Bakouma, as well as on the Zemio-Rafai and the Bria-Yalinga axes, and the establishment of temporary operating bases in Sam Ouandja, Ouadda and Ouanda Djalle. Helicopter patrols were conducted in the most isolated areas. MINUSCA also established an integrated rapid response team, based in Bria, including a mobile infantry platoon, military observers and United Nations police personnel, as well as civil affairs and human rights officers, to respond to LRA attacks in the shortest possible time.

79. MONUSCO supported the establishment of four local protection committees in Haut-Uélé Province, located in Kiliwa and Gangala Na Bodio in Dungu Territory and Kurukwata and Djabir in Faradje Territory.

80. Humanitarian assistance to LRA-affected populations remains seriously underfunded and largely unaddressed.

(c) Disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration

81. On 3 and 4 March, UNOCA, together with the African Union Commission and the United Nations Office to the African Union, convened a workshop in Addis Ababa on the review of disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration procedures and capacity for LRA returnees. The workshop brought together more than 40 representatives from the United Nations system, the African Union Commission, the African Union Regional Task Force, the International Organization for Migration, the World Bank, LRA-affected countries, non-governmental organizations and bilateral partners. Participants held in-depth discussions about the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration process in LRA-affected countries for LRA returnees. They adopted a status report, which takes stock of the current capacity, identifies the different actors and their roles and responsibilities through a Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Resettlement and Reintegration Service Network and makes recommendations to address gaps. Participants noted with concern that MINUSCA did not have a mandate to repatriate and resettle LRA returnees. They agreed that UNOCA would serve as the clearing house for facilitation and troubleshooting, in particular in case of significant delays in the repatriation of LRA returnees.

(d) Long-term development and peacebuilding support

82. The stabilization and recovery of LRA-affected areas remain seriously underfunded and mostly unaddressed. State authority and humanitarian and development actors, including United Nations entities, are largely absent; however, it is expected that the African Union Commission will initiate the process to address the significant needs in this area shortly, together with LRA-affected countries.

83. MONUSCO implemented two quick-impact projects for the construction of police stations in Faradje and Duru and rehabilitated the Dungu-Rungu-Isiro road.

C. Enhancing United Nations coherence and coordination in the subregion

84. On 20 April, UNOCA hosted the fourth meeting of United Nations presences in Central Africa. Participants, which included United Nations Resident Coordinators from six Central African countries, undertook a review of the current challenges in the area and exchanged views regarding how to better coordinate United Nations support to the countries of Central Africa and subregional organizations.

85. By its resolution 70/248, the General Assembly approved 14 new positions in UNOCA. This decision followed the recommendations of the strategic assessment review of the Office in March 2015, which were welcomed by the Security Council in June 2015 (see S/PRST/2015/12).

IV. Observations and recommendations

86. With multiple electoral processes held, or planned soon, in the subregion and related political tensions on the rise, I call upon the Governments of all relevant countries to respect the right of the population to choose their leaders and to ensure that elections are conducted in a transparent and fully competitive manner, in conformity with international human rights and humanitarian law, including with regard to the operations of internal security forces. My Special Representative will continue to carry out his good offices role and engage in preventive diplomacy, where required.

87. I am encouraged by the successful elections and end of the transition in the Central African Republic and I congratulate the Central African people and all international, regional and subregional stakeholders on this important milestone. I commend the Governments, United Nations entities and other partners that have worked tirelessly to end the crisis in the Central African Republic. I also thank my Special Representatives, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga and Abdoulaye Bathily, for their continued leadership and support in this regard. I call upon all partners to remain fully engaged to consolidate the gains made and address the continuing effects of the crisis on the Central African population, including with regard to financial support for the humanitarian response programmes.

88. Boko Haram remains a serious threat for regional peace and security. I remain gravely concerned by its devastating impact on the political, socioeconomic, humanitarian and human rights situation in the Lake Chad Basin region. I renew my call upon concerned Governments to redouble their efforts to address together the root causes of this scourge in a holistic and integrated manner, in full compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. The United Nations stands ready to assist Governments in the development of such a comprehensive response. I urge the international community to support the Multinational Joint Task Force through the mobilization of requisite political, logistical and financial support in a flexible manner. Finally, I encourage ECCAS and ECOWAS to hold without further delay the planned Summit of Heads of State on Boko Haram, which was recommended on 16 February 2015 by Heads of State and Government at the Extraordinary Summit of the ECCAS Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa.

89. Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea remains an issue of concern. I commend the efforts realized to operationalize the Interregional Coordination Centre and renew my call upon regional States and international partners to provide the resources necessary for its full functioning. UNOCA, in collaboration with UNOWAS, will continue to assist the region in mobilizing support to combat maritime insecurity.

90. Poaching and illicit wildlife trafficking in Central Africa remains of serious concern, including the continuing links between the illicit wildlife trade and armed groups in the subregion. I call upon Central African Governments to take concrete steps towards the implementation of specific measures needed to operationalize strategic decisions on countering the illicit wildlife trade, including General Assembly resolution 69/314, and the African Strategy on Combating Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora in Africa, adopted on 30 April 2015.

91. I welcome the continued progress made against LRA and commend the collective efforts of LRA-affected countries and partners, including the African Union, United Nations entities, the United States and the European Union, which have served to weaken the group over time. I remain grateful for the dedication and commitment of the soldiers of the African Union Regional Task Force and the contributing countries, the continuing efforts and operations of which are crucial to ending the threat posed by LRA.

92. The group continues to demonstrate the will and capacity to conduct attacks against civilians in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I noted with serious concern the increase in attacks committed by LRA. It is also ready to exploit any expression of fatigue on the part of the international community. Sustained pressure is needed. I urge all stakeholders to remain engaged politically, financially and militarily, including through the funding of programmes to address humanitarian challenges in LRA-affected areas. It is equally critical that international partners sustain their support to the Regional Task Force. I welcome the convening of the meeting of the Joint Coordination Mechanism in Addis Ababa from 18 to 20 May.

93. I would like to thank the General Assembly for providing additional resources and the Governments of Central African countries for supporting the strengthening of the Office.

94. I would like to express my appreciation to the Governments of Central African countries, ECCAS, CEMAC, the African Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission, the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region and other regional and subregional institutions for their continued collaboration with UNOCA. I also express my gratitude to the Multinational Joint Task Force and troop-contributing countries for their dedication and commitment to the service of peace. My appreciation also goes to the Government and the people of Gabon for their hospitality and constant assistance to UNOCA. I thank the various entities of the United Nations system working in Central Africa, including the heads of United Nations peace operations, regional offices, country teams and other relevant entities, for their support and cooperation with UNOCA.

95. Finally, I would like to thank my Special Representative, Abdoulaye Bathily, and the staff of UNOCA for their continuing efforts to advance the cause of peace and security in Central Africa.